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SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL PRESS COVERAGE OF U.S. ARREST OF EX-USG
CASHIER

REF: (A) MAPUTO 1281;

(B) MAPUTO 1345

1. Since Post's last reporting cable, two additional print articles have been disseminated about the arrest in Charleston, South Carolina, of former USAID and Embassy cashier Muftar Ali. An unofficial translation of the first article and excerpts from the second article follow:

2. Back page editorial in influential weekly O Pais (press run of 5,000):

"Alarming Silence"

by Jeremias Langa, Director

The manner in which the Mozambican Government (did not react) reacted to the detention of the Mozambican citizen Muftar Ali in the United States for allegedly stealing 200 thousand dollars while cashier at USAID and then the American Embassy in Maputo left uncertainties in the air as to what are the true responsibilities of our Government towards its citizens. The Government has opted, to date, to devote itself to an incomprehensible silence in this case, which involves a citizen who shows a nationality common to all who feel proudly Mozambican. Thus throughout the whole world, news is currently being spread that a Mozambican is involved in theft in their typical arrogance, the Americans, who do not embark in our euphemisms, they call a spade a spade and our Government does nothing to explain this to its own citizens, which leaves the sensation that the Mozambicans are not even protected by their own Government.

The duty of our Government in explaining this case is still urgently due, given the complicated circumstances in which the detention of Muftar Ali took place. Truthfully one can say that Ali was gently "kidnapped", and by opting for this strategy instead of "handing him" over to the Mozambican Justice, the Americans showed they do not trust our judicial system. The best method they found to do justice was "by their own hands," which, by the way, is not news in Bush's external policy. Or let's put it this way, it's more than a simple Mozambican citizen being detained for an alleged involvement in stealing money, it is a whole State that is at stake because, even though the money belongs to the Americans, it was here in Mozambique where it was stolen, and, having courts here and Muftar Ali not having escaped, it is here where both USAID, as well as the American Embassy, should have brought him to justice. Adding to the silence, there is ignorance of the case shown by one of our Government's Vice-Ministers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. Jos Coloma responded to O Pais by saying that this matter "does not fall under his portfolio," which is unacceptable, considering that he is a prominent figure in the MFAC. He may not have the obligation of speaking publicly on the matter, but he has the obligation to know what happens in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. Section 1 of Article 59 of the Constitution of the Republic states that "In the Republic of Mozambique, everyone has a right to protection and nobody can be jailed and be submitted to trial except within the limits of the law." In Muftar Ali's case, the Americans passed "over" the Law because even if objectively they did not commit any illegality in the way they took him to the USA, the facts prior to his trip, namely the investigation he was subject to, constitute an affirmatively criminal intention of taking him to the USA at any cost.

Article 41 of the same fundamental law states that, "[e]very citizen has the right to honor, good name, reputation, protection of his or her public image and discretion of his or her private life." The State, meanwhile, is not granting Muftar Ali any of these rights, namely conceding him judicial assistance to a free trial.

The problem, as we all know, is that this case does not involve any simple country, but rather the United States of America, thus our Government's fear of an eventual diplomatic contraction with who truly governs the world. But this State has its own laws, its own Constitution, and the Mozambicans have no other option but to believe that these judicial instruments serve in all circumstances.

3. Excerpts from story by the Mozambican Information Agency's English service, distributed by e-mail:

The wife of a Mozambican jailed in the United States on charges of theft has claimed that he was "diplomatically kidnapped" and is currently "illegally imprisoned".

The Mozambican in question, Muftar Ali, is accused of stealing over 200,000 US dollars while he was employed as a cashier at the Maputo office of the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

According to a short press release, issued three weeks ago by the

US State Department, Ali was arrested immediately when he set foot in the US city of Charleston on 16 September.

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The release quotes Acting USAID Inspector General, Bruce Crandlemire, as saying: "This indictment and arrest serves as notice by this office that fraud will not be tolerated, and that we will aggressively pursue and seek to prosecute those who attempt to commit acts of fraud, regardless of where they may be located, or what nationality they might be". The key phrase here is "regardless of where they may be located". For if Ali was living in Maputo, how come he was arrested in Charleston?

His wife claims that he was "diplomatically kidnapped", a claim that has now been broadcast at length by the Maputo private television station, STV, and by the weekly paper "O Pais", owned by the same company, SOICO. Friday's issue of another weekly, "Savana", repeats the kidnapping charge.

According to the letter sent by Ali's wife, Soraia Mamed Curgy Ali, to the Mozambican Foreign Ministry, which is printed in full in "O Pais", her husband's employers informed him on 8 April that he must at once take 15 days holiday, and that, if they needed him, they would contact him.

A few days later, the USAID Inspector-General in Pretoria, named by Soraia Ali as Laszlo Sagi, phoned Ali and said he wanted to speak with him about "confidential matters".

They met in an up-market Maputo cafe, where the Inspector asked Ali "several questions concerning his personal life and that of some colleagues, the goods he owned, and the reasons for his frequent trips to South Africa.

According to Soraia Ali's letter, other meetings followed in the presence of a US embassy security officer, named only as Alex. Ali was informed that he would no longer work at the embassy, but would be sent to some unspecified other place. This would require that he take a course and make constant trips abroad. The course was in Charleston, and in mid-September, Ali was told to take his passport to the embassy for a visa to be issued.

Apparently, despite these peculiar arrangements and the lack of any detail about his future job or course, Ali did not smell a rat. He caught a plane from Maputo on 15 September, following the route Maputo-Johannesburg-Atlanta-Charleston.

A driver from the US embassy, according to his wife, took him to the airport with two other people. From Johannesburg and Atlanta he telephoned his wife - but after he reached Charleston she heard nothing further from him. Only a few days later did she receive a phone call from a US official informing her that her husband had been arrested "for defrauding the American government".

Soraia Ali's letter requests Mozambican government intervention to ensure that her husband can "return to Mozambique as quickly as possible". If he is guilty of fraud, he should be tried in Mozambique, and given the opportunity to defend himself, she adds.

The Mozambican authorities have not yet reacted to this letter.

"O Pais" and STV spoke to one of the deputy foreign ministers, Eduardo Coloma, who said it was not his area, and he had no deep knowledge of the case.

But he pointed out that there is no extradition treaty between Mozambique and the United States. No doubt this was a factor that weighed in the minds of the American authorities when they set their trap for Ali.

Coloma also said that, like any other Mozambican abroad, Ali has the right to consular assistance from the local Mozambican Embassy. However, there are no reports that any official from the Mozambican embassy in Washington has yet visited Ali.

The Portuguese word "rapto" (which translates into English as "abduction" or "kidnap") is used repeatedly in the "O Pais" and "Savana" articles.

Yet it is clear from Soraia Ali's account that there was no abduction. Ali entered the plane voluntarily. No force was used. A honey trap was set, and he fell headlong into it.

Did the American agents break any Mozambican laws, or, as

"Savana" claims, trample on the Mozambican constitution?

A skillful lawyer might argue that the deceitful offer of a new job and a training course constitutes a form of fraud. And doubtless the operations in Maputo of secret agents from the State Department violates normal diplomatic relations.

But the Americans clearly have no intention of heeding any such protests. The State Department Inspector General, Howard Krongard, defended the arrest on the grounds that such efforts "help to ensure that the US taxpayer dollars are safeguarded and not exploited for personal gain".

No doubt the Americans will also argue that since the alleged crime was committed on American premises, and the arrest took place on American soil, there's nothing to worry about. Mozambicans, however, will feel distinctly uneasy at the clandestine operations of American agents, even if the target is a man accused of a serious crime.

Will Ali receive a fair trial? The State Department insists that he will. "Criminal charges are not evidence of guilt", its release said. "A defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty".

LA LIME